

## WHY GREAT POWERS INVADED AND FAILED IN AFGHANISTAN

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by

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## **ABSTRACT**

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Afghanistan is a country which has been keeping the attention of the international community for more than three decades. In its most recent history, two great powers have tried to invade this country. The Union of Soviet Socialistic Republics (USSR) failed and the United States is trying to avoid the same fate. Not only those two great powers struggled in Afghanistan. Many great powers throughout history have shown their presence in Afghanistan, starting from the great Persian Empire (6th and 5th century BC) through the Macedonian Empire (4th century BC), then the White Huns (5th century AD), the Muslim Arabs (7th century AD), the Islamic Turks (10th century AD), the Mongolian Empire (13th century AD), and later on the British and Russian Empires (19th and 20th century AD). This paper will lay out historical evidence that shows why all of the great powers failed to occupy Afghanistan successfully and ends with some short recommendations based on the historical facts of the three cases. Some of the recommendations might be taken into consideration in the current NATO (North Atlantic Treaty Organization) campaign in Afghanistan.





## WHY GREAT POWERS INVADED AND FAILED IN AFGHANISTAN

Throughout history Great Powers invaded and failed in Afghanistan. Why? Afghanistan is a poor country in which mountainous areas and desert are the dominant features. Agriculture and pastoralism are the main occupations for the Afghan people. Many times during their hard and painful history Afghans have met with famine as a result of harsh climate, drought, and floods.

Looking at the Macedonian, then British, and finally Soviet campaigns, this paper will try to determine why these Great Powers invaded and failed in Afghanistan. I chose those three cases because all of them occurred in different time periods and in different politico-military circumstances and in all of them the invaders had different reasons for going to Afghanistan. I know of other cases (Mongols under the leadership of Genghis Khan) which suggest that occupation of Afghanistan is possible. I did not include this case because the methods used by the Mongols in their campaign were very inhuman and uncivilized, and it would be inappropriate to make any comparison with the current situation in Afghanistan.

Each case analysis begins with a short summary about the politico-military situation before the invasion, and then I try to answer these questions: Why did the great power(s) invade Afghanistan, what strategy did they use, what strategy did the Afghans use, and finally, why did the Powers fail or succeed. The conclusion includes some short recommendations based on the historical facts of the three cases. Some of the conclusions and recommendations might be taken into consideration in the current NATO (North Atlantic Treaty Organization) campaign in Afghanistan.

## **The Macedonian Empire and Afghanistan**

In the 4<sup>th</sup> and 3<sup>th</sup> centuries BC, the Macedonian Empire rose in power. As he took the throne of the Great Macedonian Empire, Alexander III the Macedonian (356 – 323 BC, in western countries known as Alexander the Great), started to realize his concept of a great kingdom, in which all nations would enjoy equality and practice their own languages, cultures, and customs under his supervision. After the great victory over the Persian Empire in 331 and 330 BC, Alexander entered the territories nowadays known as Afghanistan. His plan to use those territories as a “highway” to India failed as a result of strong resistance from the Afghan tribes. He stayed in that country for two years, fighting an increasingly senseless war.

At that time, the area now known as Afghanistan was under Persian rule and it was not known as a “wealthy” country. Moreover, Alexander during his eastern military campaign realized the harshness of the Afghan climate and terrain and the poverty of the people. The Macedonian Army suffered more casualties as a result of climate conditions and lack of water than in combat activities.<sup>1</sup> Therefore, the natural resources were not a reason to invade Afghanistan. Because people believed that India was a country at the end of the world, Alexander thought that by occupying India he would become the master of all Asia.<sup>2</sup> The Afghan territories were in the path to India, and Alexander treated these territories as a “highway of conquest” between west, central, and southern Asia.<sup>3</sup>

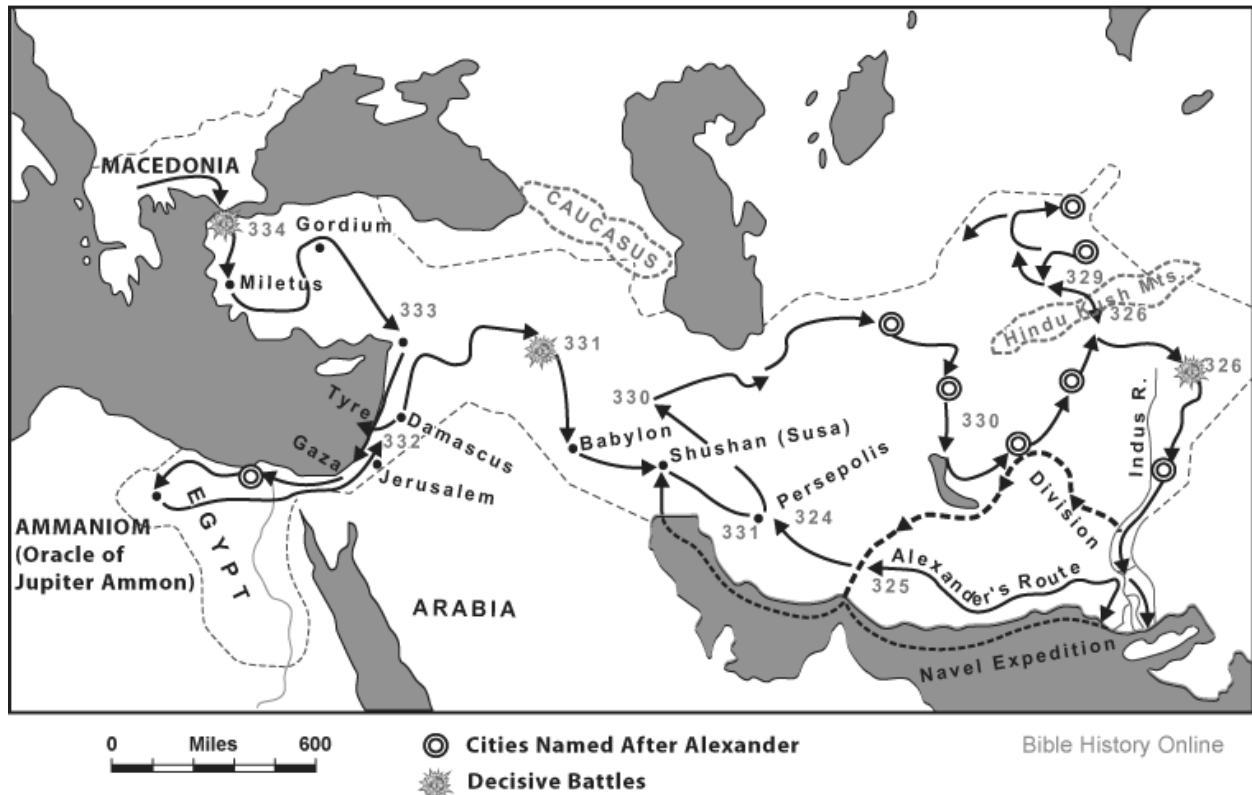


Figure 1: Alexander III the Macedonian - Military Campaign on East

In his military campaign in Afghanistan, Alexander practiced his strategy of building new cities in newly occupied territories. All of these cities were named “Alexandria.” The reason for building new cities was: first, to found self-sustaining garrisons manned by Macedonian troops in order to maintain his rule in distant territories once he had passed through. Second, he needed to drop off thousands of wounded, sick, or weary troops who could not keep up.<sup>4</sup> Actually, these cities were more political than military, as “their administration was carefully organized, peaceful conditions were restored, trade was stimulated and the forces left in the garrisons were police forces and colonists rather than armies of occupation.”<sup>5</sup>

In his strategy, Alexander created a clear distinction between political and military objectives. The political objective was to win the people in newly invaded countries over to his side; while the military objective was just to defeat the enemy’s army. If he

achieved the political objective, he would restrain himself from using military force. When he entered the territory now known as Helmand province, he realized that the people there “enjoyed a form of government unlike that of the other barbarians in that part of the world.”<sup>6</sup> Therefore, he left them free to govern themselves. Apparently, the political objective had a primary role.

All his political and military activities in newly invaded countries were directed toward winning the people’s minds. Thus, from a political point of view it was very important to keep the Macedonian Army disciplined and to prevent the plundering of conquered districts, as was the case with mercenary armies in ancient times. Hence, he paid his soldiers in extensive money gifts as compensation.<sup>7</sup> Although he preferred political means over military ones, in Afghanistan, using military power in order to keep the country under his rule was inevitable.

The Afghan strategy was to tear the Macedonian army apart, to evade stronger Macedonian units and to fight against smaller ones. Very often they would “disperse to their homes,”<sup>8</sup> and after the Macedonian army passed they would gather again and continue fighting. They attacked primarily the logistical elements of the Macedonian Army, such as main supply roads, less defended bases, and small units that controlled communications and the territories.

The tribes were accustomed to severe climatic conditions, and they were skilled in using the geographical conditions of the terrain. They were organized into small fighting groups and highly mobile, combining all of these advantages with the initiative over broad territory. They put the Macedonian Army in an awkward position, forcing them into permanent marching and fighting. Alexander was facing a new challenge,

little known at that time, but known today as an insurgency. Alexander did not expect that Afghanistan would become a nightmare and an unsolved enigma for him and his army.

As a result of continued fighting against restless tribes in Afghanistan and in severe climatic conditions to which Macedonians were not accustomed, the Macedonian Army suffered the most losses in dead and wounded in Afghanistan than in the rest of its campaigns in the east. Therefore, in 329 BC, Alexander received a larger reinforcement than ever before, 2,600 cavalry and 19,400 infantry. These soldiers would be used for putting down rebellions and to continue his military campaign to India.<sup>9</sup>

After two years of fighting a futile military campaign against restless Afghan tribes, Macedonian soldiers began to show open disagreement to Alexander's intention to put uncivilized tribes under his rule. The disagreement became very serious when some of his commanders had organized an assassination plot and put his life in danger.

The Macedonian Army was well trained, highly skilled, and perhaps "physically tougher than any modern army of the western hemisphere,"<sup>10</sup> but it was an army trained to fight against another armed army on the battlefield, where military knowledge, skills, experience, and courage defined victory. Afghanistan was different. Ever since they left Persia, when not freezing in mountain snows or baking on scorched deserts, the Macedonian troops had been in constant combat against enemies who would not quit. And for what?<sup>11</sup>

Alexander faced a really difficult situation, besides permanent Afghan rebellions, as he had to keep the unity of the Macedonian Army if he wanted to achieve his dream. As a great politician, he found that at that time he needed a new ally among the Afghan

tribes. After defeating the Bactrian ruler (Bactria was a province in northern Afghanistan, nowadays called Balkh), Alexander decided to marry the Bactrian princess Roxanne, the ruler's daughter. With this political marriage he acquired a new ally. Furthermore, he put the Northern provinces under his control and additionally he enlisted the Bactrian cavalry and soldiers from eastern provinces, in total about 30,000,<sup>12</sup> in order to start his military campaign toward the Indian kingdoms. Moreover, he succeeded in keeping the Macedonian Army unified.

Afghanistan was an unsuccessful story for the great Emperor. Why did he fail to conquer and pacify that land? First, the victorious Macedonian Army was not trained to overcome the new challenge of fighting against insurgencies. Second, Macedonians had underestimated the difficulties of climate as well as the geographical conditions in that country. Third, for the first time the morale of the Macedonian Army was almost broken as a result of the exhaustion of fighting in a senseless war. Fourth, Alexander presumed that invading Afghanistan and putting its people under his rule would be an easy job, but he realized that it was an extremely difficult job and in only two years he could not achieve this goal. Fifth, he underestimated the Afghan desire to fight for their freedom.

Although Alexander III the Macedonian succeeded to achieve his political goal, Afghan story was a nightmare and a bad experience for the Macedonian Empire. In the 19<sup>th</sup> century British Empire was straggling for its influence in Afghanistan. What experience they got?

## The British Empire and Afghanistan

In the 19th and the beginning of the 20th centuries the British Empire was the biggest in the world, spreading its influence not only in Europe but in Africa and Asia as well. The British emphasized their effort in India, a region whose wealth was well known even in the ancient time. But India's wealth had attracted Russia too, or so the British politicians thought.



Figure 2: Central Asian Region

Both Empires started to struggle for economic and political influence in the Central Asian countries. In Afghanistan, they tried to get their influence either by

occupying or by creating a “buffer state” in that country. This period became known as the “Great Game.”<sup>13</sup>

During the time of the “Great Game,” when England and Russia had showed their muscles in Inner Asia, the Afghan economy was still poor and most people were subsistence farmers or small traders.<sup>14</sup> In some regions, a money economy was unknown, and the natural economy was a dominant one.<sup>15</sup> Consequently, neither England nor Russia intended to invade Afghanistan for direct economic gain. Because those two Empires struggled to have their influence prevail in Afghanistan in order to prevent other side`s influence, it appears that the main reason for invading was the geo-strategic position of Afghanistan.

In 19<sup>th</sup> century Russia was undergoing a great expansion. In order to get closer to India and to “warm waters” and southern ports, it occupied some provinces in Central Asia (Khiva, Bokhara, Tashkent, and some significant independent cities such as Samarkand) and came closer to the Afghan borders. It also conquered those places for the wealth they had, including slaves

The British were worried about Russia`s expansion and they considered that the Russians would launch an attack on India through Central Asian countries and Afghanistan. As William Moorcroft, who was an English intelligence agent operating in the countries in central Asia, wrote in his reports to the Governor General of India, “if the British did not get their hands on Afghanistan first, then the Russians almost certainly would.”<sup>16</sup> During the peak of the Great Game (1839–1919), England fought three wars against Afghanistan. In all three wars, the British had the same political object but different strategies.



### The First Anglo-Afghan War (1839-1942)

The most significant of the three wars was the first Anglo-Afghan War. In 1839, Russia sent an emissary to Kabul in order to offer support to the Afghans if they decided to attack Peshawar (an Afghan city that had come under British supported Sikh rule).<sup>17</sup> At that time, Dost Mohamed was the king of Afghanistan, and he had had very close relations with the British. Although Dost Mohamed was loyal to the British many times, the British dubbed his behavior a threat to their policy in that region and decided to replace him. But instead of replacing him in a very subtle manner, the British chose another strategy. They sent a strong military force to Afghanistan in order to defeat Afghan forces and to place Shah Soojah, then in political exile in India, on the throne as the new Afghan ruler. And after accomplishing these goals the plan was to return the Army to the British land in India.<sup>18</sup>

Although there were some doubts among some of the British generals and politicians about the effectiveness of a military campaign, in the beginning the British Army conducted a successful military operation. When they reached Kabul, however, the English realized that their marionette ruler did not have any popular support. Thus, they had to fight against some tribal leaders who opposed Soojah in order to calm the situation and provide a peaceful transition to his reign. Because the new ruler had no significant support by the population, the British stayed for two more years in order to strengthen Soojah`s reign.

But their behavior toward the Afghans was irresponsible, careless, and provocative, as they “started to play fast and loose with the ladies of the city both married and unmarried and this caused great resentment. The troops also drank in

public...”<sup>19</sup> Afghan dissatisfaction about such British behavior grew until rebellion became unavoidable. The British had not realized that a rebellion was being prepared even though some information was offered to them by some loyal Afghans. Rebellion started in Kabul on 23 December 1841 after the British cut back the subsidy to the Ghilzai tribes. The uprising had substantial support from the local population. The British were pressed to sign an agreement with the rebels, who were led by Mohamad Akbar (son of Dost Mohamed). With that agreement, the British soldiers and their family members, as well as camp followers, had to retreat to India under the protection of Akbar's troops. The result of that retreat was disastrous as some 4,500 troops and 12,000 camp followers were slaughtered.<sup>20</sup>

After this disastrous defeat, the British sent strong military forces into Afghanistan in order to achieve three objectives. “The first was to relieve the garrisons that were still there and rescue the captives. The second was to re-establish the British military reputation. The third was to withdraw altogether from Afghanistan.”<sup>21</sup> In order to achieve these goals, the British sent two columns, one to Jalalabad and the other to Kandahar, where the British garrisons were holding out.<sup>22</sup> The British severely defeated the Afghans in the military operations and both garrisons were relieved. In September 1842, the British re-entered Kabul and found and recovered the captives. After achieving those goals, the British returned to India. These accomplishments showed that the British Army achieved all three objectives following its strategy strictly,.

What were the reasons for such a debacle of British policy? First, the British had not kept to their strategy. After having military success and replacing the old ruler, they should have retreated to India as was planned in advance. Second, they made a wrong

political assumption about the political capacity of Soojah, and his support by the Afghans. Third, an undue confidence in the Afghans was another mistake, which caused the British soldiers and politicians to make a mistaken estimation of the situation.<sup>23</sup> Fourth, the British underestimated poverty in that country as well as climatic and geographical conditions. Fifth, they underestimated Afghan decisiveness to fight for their freedom; as retired general Mounstuart Elphinstone wrote that Afghan people are very turbulent, will perceive English troops to be invaders, would be disaffected, and would be glad to fight in order to drive English out.<sup>24</sup> As sixth reason for the British failure was that the British thought that Soojah's rule could be imposed upon the Afghans by British bayonets.<sup>25</sup> Finally, as Patrick Macrory argued, there is another aspect of the tragedy, which is the impossibility of controlling, by force of arms alone, a country where the mass of the people are against the "foreigner."<sup>26</sup>

#### The Second Anglo – Afghan War (1878-1882)



Before the British started their military campaign they had a strictly defined political object, which was to replace the current ruler Sher Ali with a ruler of their choosing. The military object was to defeat Afghan forces and to create a situation for taking over the reign. Just like the First Anglo-Afghan War.

In the beginning of the war the British had operational success, despite of the fact that the British suffered some crushing defeat as it was in Maiwand, at the end they captured Kabul and Kandahar, and ruler Yaqub Khan (the son of Sher Ali, who died in 1879) asked for negotiations. The Afghan ruler accepted all of the British conditions, asking only for some subsidies for him and his successors. After accepting a new Afghan ruler, the British left the country. Although the British viewed new ruler Abdur Rahman as pro-Russian, because he was in exile in Russia by that time, they had no better choice but to accept him as the new Afghan ruler.

In accordance with the agreement, the British had great benefits. The occupied territories in eastern and southern Afghanistan stayed a part of British India. Additionally, Afghanistan was obliged to hand over control of its foreign policy to British hands.

What was the reason for British success in the Second Afghan War? Making a clear distinction between the political and military objects, the British militarily defeated the Afghans and partially achieved their political goal (leading Afghan foreign policy).

### The Third Anglo-Afghan War (1919)

This war was a continuation of the first two. This time war was initiated by the Afghans, under the leadership of King Amanullah in order to take over the former

Afghan territories south of the Durand line and to become entirely independent, which meant to have foreign policy in Afghan hands. The British, having had fought in Afghanistan twice already, did not want to enter a new war. Also this was just after World War I, when many countries had suffered too much already and had no interest to fight anywhere. Certainly, the British did not wish to fight in Afghanistan

On the other hand, the 1907 Anglo-Russian Convention attempted to end the "Great Game."<sup>30</sup> The Convention was signed as a result of pressure by other regional powers, such as Germany and Japan. The Russians were engaged in the Far East fighting against Japanese and their interest toward Afghanistan diminished. In the same period, the British were afraid of Germany's march east. Actually, at that time Germany received a concession for some of the Chinese ports as well as a concession for mining in China. In accordance with the Convention, Russia formally recognized Afghanistan as a British sphere of influence. England on its side was obliged not to interrupt the trade relations between Russia and Afghanistan. In addition, England was no longer to oppose Russia's wish to control Turkish straits.<sup>31</sup> Thus, Afghanistan was not the focus of either Russia or England.

The British strategy was not to become deeply involved politically, and any military engagement was planned to be limited by means. Amanullah was aware of the international political situation at that time, and exhaustion of the British after the World War I and tried to take advantage of the situation in order to achieve independence for his country. His strategy was to provoke an uprising by the Indians in Peshawar who would be supported by the native Afghans living in that city. After beginning of the uprising he would send Afghan forces to enter Indian Territory. But his plan was

revealed and the uprising was unsuccessful. The British using its full spectrum of military means such as infantry units, some armored vehicles, and air forces, succeeded in defeating the Afghans.

An agreement was signed that allowed the territories south of the Durand Line to stay a part of India. On the other hand, the Afghans achieved full independence, having foreign policy in their hands. British involvement in that country ended, successfully or not. Because the main political goal of the British was to prevent Russians from occupying Afghanistan, from that point of view British involvement could be estimated as a partial success. The British had not allowed Russia to achieve its goals, but the British also had not kept Afghanistan occupied.

The British experience in Afghanistan is unique in the history of that country. No one great power had struggled for such a long period, almost a century, in order to maintain its influence there. During this period of fighting three wars, the British finally learned how to achieve the political goals by choosing clear political objectives and correct military strategy. The next great super power that fought for their influence in Afghanistan was the USSR. What experience did they face in that poor country inhabited by proud people ready to fight for their freedom unconditionally?

### **The Soviet Union and Afghanistan**

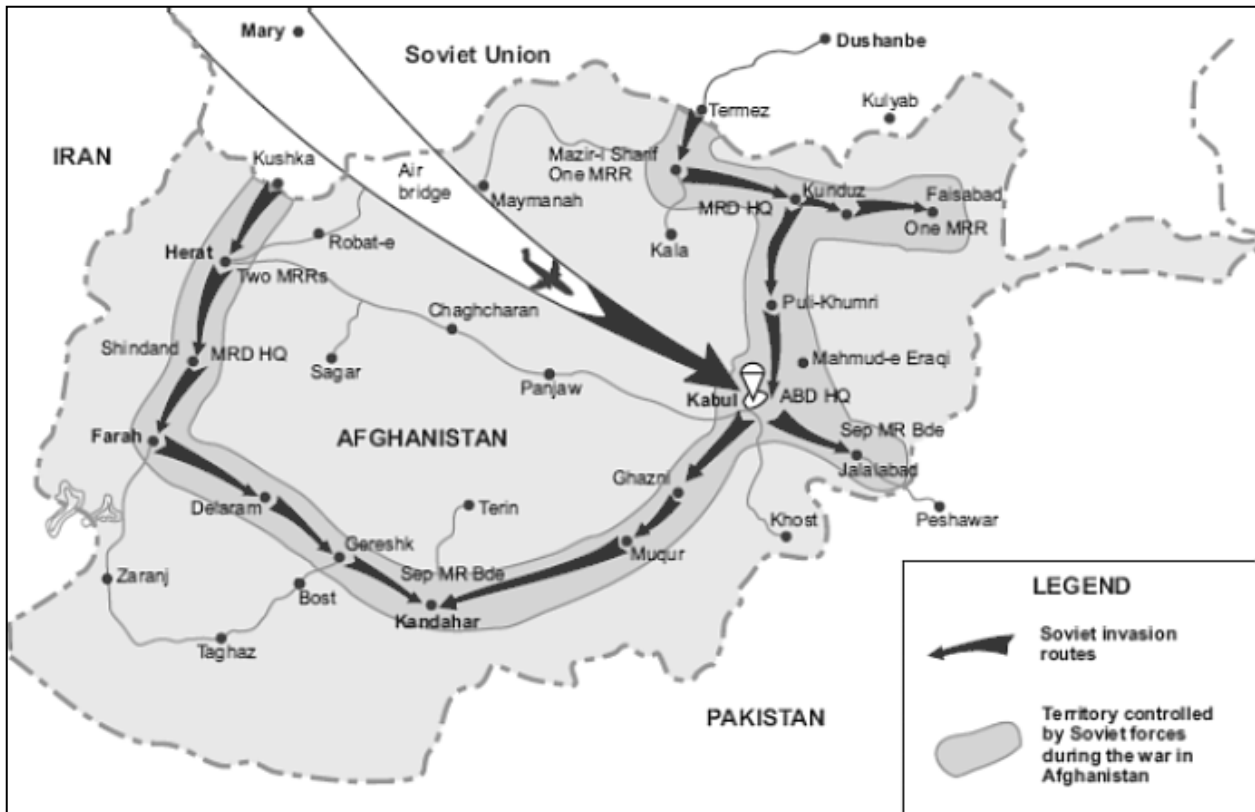
At the end of the 20th century some dramatic events occurred. The United States lost its influence in Iran and Pakistan. Trying to exploit the momentum of change in 1979, the Soviet Union invaded Afghanistan. In that particular time the Afghan economy was almost entirely dependent on Moscow's aid. In 1953, domestic revenue had funded 93% of Afghan expenditures. Ten years later, domestic revenue funded only 38% of

state expenditures.<sup>32</sup> By 1979, Afghanistan received more than \$1 billion in economic aid.<sup>33</sup> The Soviets used Afghan natural gas for their own purposes. Soviet import statistics showed a quadrupling in value of gas from 33.7 billion rubles in 1978 to 134.9 billion in 1980."<sup>34</sup> It was a way for the Soviets to recover some of their military expenditure in Afghanistan. Gas by itself was not a reason for military intervention.

The Soviet authorities offered several reasons for invading Afghanistan. First, the Soviet leaders believed that after Washington lost its influence in Iran, it would plan to turn Afghanistan into its anti-Soviet outpost in Central Asia.<sup>35</sup> The second reason was to revitalize a failing Marxist regime, as KGB Chief Yuri Andropov explained in 1980. The former US Secretary of State Alexander Haig offered another explanation, which was that the Soviets had intervened in Afghanistan in order to undermine the strengthening of Islamic radicals in the Muslim countries on its southern borders.<sup>36</sup> But perhaps the primary reason for invading Afghanistan for Leonid Brezhnev and his companions was to reach the warm seas.<sup>37</sup> By achieving that political object, the Soviets would get closer to the oilfields in Iran and Saudi Arabia,<sup>38</sup> and would have an all-weather port.

The Soviet involvement in Afghanistan began in the 1950s, when a large number of Afghan officers were sent to the USSR for military education. As a result of these policies, the Soviets created a small but ideologically committed base of highly educated young people in society as well as in the Afghan military. Later, those people would be used to spread Marxist propaganda among the Afghan population.





Source=<http://cgsc.leavenworth.army.mil>

Figure 4: USSR Invasion- Afghanistan 1979

The Soviet strategy for invading Afghanistan was to enter rapidly with approximately 85,000 soldiers and to achieve the primary military objectives of securing the capital, key military bases and main roads. But later on these military objectives would become long term political objectives because primarily politically planned objectives, such as to revitalize a failing Marxist regime, had not been achieved.

Soon after the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan, however, the situation became worse. The Soviets expected that the Afghan people would accept the new government led by the Afghan communist party backed by the Soviet Union, but these expectations were totally unrealistic. This Puppet government was considered to be illegitimate by the Afghan population. Only a small number of pro-Soviet communists were supportive

of the communist regime. Despite the fact that the Soviets had limited military objectives, the Afghans perceived the military intervention to be an act of occupation.

The Soviets faced a strong resistance by the Afghan insurgents, called “mujahidin” (fighters in holy war, jihad)<sup>39</sup> “In 1981, the mujahidin initiated over 5,000 attacks on Soviet and Afghan units, and in the first nine months of 1982, the number almost doubled to 7,600.”<sup>40</sup> By the end of 1983, the Soviets controlled only 10%-20% of Afghan territory. They controlled mainly major cities, main communications, and certain fortified positions.<sup>41</sup> In 1984 the Soviets launched a vast offensive in order to regain the initiative and defeat the mujahidin. Many villagers were intimidated for being suspected of supporting the mujahidin. Nonmilitary targets were attacked causing a huge number of civilian casualties. It seemed to be war on civilians. The offensive ended without having any success; moreover, the Soviets paid a high price for their adventure. As of early 1984, the cost of military intervention was estimated at 13,500 to 30,000 casualties, and a huge number of aircraft, tanks, and armored personal carriers were destroyed.<sup>42</sup> Instead of defeating the insurgents and getting the Afghans over to their side, the Soviets faced stronger resistance and the number of mujahidin increased drastically.

In an effort to reconcile their political and military objectives in a difficult situation the Soviets made a mistake, emphasizing military means over political ones. They started to increase the number of their soldiers, considering that if they outnumbered the insurgents the military actions would be more effective and that maintaining control over the territories would be much easier.

That pattern shows what a difficult situation the Soviets faced. Fighting in a senseless war, Soviet soldiers would ask themselves out of despair “what are we doing in Afghanistan?”<sup>43</sup> Without having a successful strategy to fight against an insurgency, and after ten bloody years, the Soviets withdrew from Afghanistan.

Although lightly armed in the beginning of the war, the Afghans started using the same strategy that was used by their ancestors, who successfully fought against great Empires throughout history. Organized in small groups that skillfully used terrain and local conditions, they succeeded in inflicting serious damage on Soviet units. Since their military operations grew more intensive and successful overtime, the support by the local population increased, and the territories that were under their control became larger.

The mujahidin were strongly supported by the United States, Pakistan, China, Saudi Arabia, and other states that saw the Soviet military intervention as an act of expansionism. The US concern was about a Soviet approach to the Persian Gulf oil fields and warm-water ports.<sup>44</sup> Therefore, the US plan was to support the mujahidin to press the Soviets into leaving Afghan territory. Actually, the US support to the Mujahidin started some six months before the Soviet intervention.<sup>45</sup> The United States, together with Saudi Arabia, were the main money contributors to the mujahidin rebels. The US money contribution in 1980 started with about \$30 million and by 1985 it was about \$625 million.<sup>46</sup> The US support to the Afghan mujahidin went through Pakistan and its military security service (ISI). At the same time, China became a major source of weapons.<sup>47</sup> Egypt, Saudi Arabia, Pakistan, and China organized training camps for mujahidin, in which 55,000 men could be trained simultaneously. Many other countries

such as Germany, France, Britain, and Japan contributed by sending money, weapons and other aid to Afghanistan.<sup>48</sup>

There are many reasons for the Soviet failure in Afghanistan. One of the most important is that Soviet leaders made a faulty assumption about the willingness of the Afghan people to accept the Soviet model of mono-organizational socialism.<sup>49</sup> Islamic ideology and tribal organization in Afghan society were not compatible with the Soviet model of socialism. The second reason was that Soviet policy makers were not successful in reconciling their political and military objectives. The earlier military objectives later became the main political objectives. Third, the Soviet military means prevailed over political means and consequently they did not succeed in getting the people over to their side, which is a main goal in fighting against insurgency. The fourth reason for the Soviet failure was the shortage of domestic public support. As the war dragged on, some Soviet commanders in Afghanistan complained that the newspapers were making fun of military glory, patriotism, and personal courage.<sup>50</sup> In 1984, human rights activists in Moscow conducted a poll and the results were disastrous for the military, as actually 62 percent of the respondents were against the war.<sup>51</sup> The fifth reason was that the Soviet Army was not trained in counterinsurgent activities. Finally, the Soviet military leaders had underestimated the historical facts about Afghan persistence in fighting for their freedom.

## **Conclusion**

Clear historical evidence suggests why the great Empires have not succeeded in occupying Afghanistan. First, none of them had a proper strategy to fight insurgency. Second, the political and military objects were generally not clearly defined and

sometimes they mixed with each other. For all of them, Afghanistan was not the primary objective, and after spending so many resources and paying high prices in money and sacrifices, they lost their domestic support and were forced to withdraw. Not one Great Power succeeded in conquering Afghanistan, but some of those Powers achieved their political goals by combining political and military means, without keeping Afghanistan occupied.

Alexander, in his two-year military campaign, did not defeat the insurgency militarily. Politically, as evidence suggests, he succeeded because he finally achieved his dream to reach India and to create the biggest kingdom ever seen. The British did not succeed in militarily occupying Afghanistan but politically they succeeded because they achieved their main goal; they kept Afghanistan from Russian occupation.

The Soviets did not succeed either militarily or politically. For the military failure, the reasons are almost the same as in other cases. For the political failure, the reason is that the Soviets tried to impose a new political system, which was not even close to the social structure of the Afghan Muslim population. Another reason that had a big impact on Soviet failure is the great support for the Afghans by the international community, especially by the United States, Saudi Arabia, Pakistan, China and other Muslim countries.

This study suggests that two possible outcomes exist for the current Great Power (United States) that is embroiled in Afghanistan. First, the United States could redefine political and military goals and give priority to political and economic activities over the military ones in achieving those goals. The second possibility, as historical facts show, is to fight an “endless war,”<sup>52</sup> until exhaustion leads to loss of will and defeat.

Based on the analyzed historical cases there are some recommendations that could be taken as possible guidance. In counterinsurgency the primary objective is to get the peoples` minds over to your side. In order to have success there are some things that have to be avoided, such as:

- Imposing a “puppet government” or government without legitimacy on the Afghan people.
- Imposing your own ideology over Afghans does not give results, because of the Afghan religion and society which are very rigid, and not open to any “foreign progressive ideas.”
- Permanent military activities do not grant long-term success; moreover, they could provoke stronger opposition and greater support for the insurgents by the locals, and on the other hand, could damage the morale in your own units.
- Increasing the number of the soldiers does not grant success, and it may even have a bad side-effect, as the more troops on the ground means the more targets for the enemy. It could also be viewed by the locals as an intention for long-term military presence; then there is a risk to be seen as invaders.
- Paying subvention and bribery to the local warlords and local leaders in order to keep the situation calm has a limited time effect.
- Avoid getting involved in fighting against local criminals, because it will have short- term success and one`s own forces will became exhausted by fighting on two “fronts,” against the insurgency and against local criminals.

Some suggestions for positive actions are:

- Provide a multilateral approach from the international community, involving not only NATO countries but also regional powers in that region such as China, India, and Russia.
- Have full respect for Afghan culture and history.
- Leave the local population to have more political responsibilities for their future by providing regular regional and state elections.
- Increase intelligence activities and permanently keep in touch with the local population by providing infrastructure projects.
- In order to build up mutual confidence with the local population, provide sufficient funds to build schools, hospitals, improve the road network, and build effective local and state administrations.

Great Powers came in Afghanistan for different reasons, using its territory as a “highway” to the east, creating a “buffer state” on its territory to prevent Afghanistan from other country’s influence or using the country as a transit point to the “southern ports” and “warm waters” of the Indian ocean. All of the Great Powers failed in trying to successfully conquer Afghanistan. This paper was an attempt to find the answer to that why they failed. The paper surely does not answer all questions that are related to the current situation; therefore, there is an opportunity for more research.

Also, the story about Afghanistan is continuing. The nature of the Great Powers is to spread their influence, and Afghanistan as the “heart of Asia”, will be the focus of their interests for a long period.

## Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> Stephen Tanner, *Afghanistan: A Military History from Alexander The Great to the Fall of the Taliban* (New York: Da Capo Press, 2002), 42, 51.

<sup>2</sup> Arrian, *The Campaigns of Alexander*, trans. Aubrey De Selincourt with an introduction by J.R. Hamilton (New York: Penguin Books, 1971), 228.

<sup>3</sup> Martin Ewans, *Afghanistan: A Short History of Its People and Politics*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (New York: Harper Collins Publishers: 2002), 17.

<sup>4</sup> Stephen Tanner, *Afghanistan: A Military History from Alexander The Great to the Fall of the Taliban* (New York, Da Capo Press, 2002), 40.

<sup>5</sup> J.F.C. Fuller, *The Generalship of Alexander The Great* (New York: Da Capo Press, 1960), 289.

<sup>6</sup> Stephen Tanner, *Afghanistan: A Military History from Alexander The Great to the Fall of the Taliban* (New York: Da Capo Press, 2002), 37.

<sup>7</sup> .F.C. Fuller, *The Generalship of Alexander The Great* (New York: Da Capo Press, 1960), 285.

<sup>8</sup> Arrian, *The Campaigns of Alexander*, trans. Aubrey De Selincourt with an introduction by J.R. Hamilton (New York: Penguin Books, 1971), 196.

<sup>9</sup> .G.L. Hammond, *The Genius of Alexander The Great* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1997), 147.

<sup>10</sup> N.G.L. Hammond, *The Genius of Alexander The Great* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1997), 139.

<sup>11</sup> Stephen Tanner, *Afghanistan: A Military History from Alexander The Great to the Fall of the Taliban* (New York: Da Capo Press, 2002), 48.

<sup>12</sup> Stephen Tanner, *Afghanistan: A Military History from Alexander The Great to the Fall of the Taliban* (New York: Da Capo Press, 2002), 49.

<sup>13</sup> Peter Hopkirk, *The Great Game: The Struggle for Empire in Central Asia* (New York: Kodansha America, 1992), 1.

<sup>14</sup> Vartan Gregorian, *The Emergence of Modern Afghanistan: Politics of Reform and Modernization, 1880-1946* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1969), 58.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, 57.

<sup>16</sup> Peter Hopkirk, *The Great Game: The Struggle for Empire in Central Asia* (New York: Kodansha America, 1992), 99.

<sup>17</sup> Patrick Macrory, *Signal Catastrophe: The Story of Disastrous Retreat from Kabul 1842* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1996), 56.



<sup>18</sup> Ibid., 76.

<sup>19</sup> Martin Ewans, *Afghanistan: A Short History of Its People and Politics*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (New York: Harper Collins Publishers, 2002), 66.

<sup>20</sup> Martin Ewans, *Afghanistan: A Short History of Its People and Politics*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (New York: Harper Collins Publishers, 2002), 69.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid., 71.

<sup>22</sup> Martin Ewans, *Afghanistan: A Short History of Its People and Politics*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (New York: Harper Collins Publishers, 2002), 71.

<sup>23</sup> Patrick Macrory, *Signal Catastrophe: The Story of Disastrous Retreat from Kabul 1842* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1996), 267.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid., 82.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid., 267.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid., 7.

<sup>27</sup> Martin Ewans, *Afghanistan: A Short History of Its People and Politics*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (New York: Harper Collins Publishers, 2002), 81, 82.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid., 84.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid., 85.

<sup>30</sup> Martin Ewans, *Afghanistan: A Short History of Its People and Politics*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (New York: Harper Collins Publishers, 2002), 114.

<sup>31</sup> Peter Hopkirk, *The Great Game: The Struggle for Empire in Central Asia* (New York: Kodansha America, 1992), 520.

<sup>32</sup> William Maley, *the Afghanistan Wars* (New York, Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), 13.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid., 19.

<sup>34</sup> Henry Bradsher, *Afghanistan and the Soviet Union* (Durham, Duke University Press, 1985), 238.

<sup>35</sup> Artyom Borovik, *The Hidden War* (New York: Grove Press, 1990), 10.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid., 9.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid., 7.

<sup>38</sup> Henry Bradsher, *Afghanistan and the Soviet Union* (Durham, Duke University Press, 1985), 159.

<sup>39</sup> Ludwig W. Adamec, *Historical Dictionary Of Afghanistan* 3<sup>rd</sup> edition (The Scarecrow Press, Inc. Lanham, Maryland, and Oxford 2003), 265.

<sup>40</sup> Martin Ewans, *Afghanistan: A Short History of Its People and Politics*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (New York: Harper Collins Publishers: 2002), 223.

<sup>41</sup> Anthony Arnold, *Afghanistan The Soviet Invasion in Perspective*, revised and enlarged edition (Stanford, California: Hoover Institution Press, Stanford University, 1985), 98.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, 99.

<sup>43</sup> Artyom Borovik, *The Hidden War* (New York: Grove Press, 1990), 115.

<sup>44</sup> Martin Ewans, *Afghanistan: A Short History of Its People and Politics*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (New York: Harper Collins Publishers: 2002), 208.

<sup>45</sup> William Maley, *the Afghanistan Wars* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002), 65.

<sup>46</sup> Henry Bradsher, *Afghanistan and the Soviet Union* (Durham, Duke University Press, 1985), 277-278.

<sup>47</sup> Angelo Rasanayagam, *Afghanistan A Modern History* (London: I.B. Tauris & Co. Ltd, 2003) 105.

<sup>48</sup> Henry Bradsher, *Afghanistan and the Soviet Union* (Durham, Duke University Press, 1985), 276.

<sup>49</sup> William Maley, *the Afghanistan Wars* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002), 1.

<sup>50</sup> Artyom Borovik, *The Hidden War* (New York: Grove Press, 1990), 230.

<sup>51</sup> William Maley, *the Afghanistan Wars* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), 45.

<sup>52</sup> Larry Goodson, *Afghanistan's Endless War: State Failure, Regional Politics, and the Rise of the Taliban* (Seattle: University of Washington Press).